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FOR INFORMATION

COUNTRY NOTE**

# Thailand

SUMMARY

The Executive Director presents the country note for Thailand for a programme of cooperation for the period 1999 to 2003.

## THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN AND WOMEN

1. Thailand has largely achieved the mid-decade goals, and the health, education, and water and sanitation goals for the year 2000 are on track or have already been achieved. Although still not reaching everyone, these achievements have benefited primarily younger children. Of growing concern now are the 10 million children in the second decade of life, increasing numbers of whom are in need of special protection. Those most at risk are likely to be distinguished by similar ethnic, geographic and social factors. Estimates of the number of children involved in prostitution vary from 60,000 to 200,000. About 1.6 million children are out of school, and some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) estimate that 1.1 million are working.

2. HIV/AIDS remains a major threat. Its prevalence among women attending prenatal clinics is about 2 per cent nationally, but the average in eight provinces, mainly in the north and north-east, ranges from 5 to 10 per cent. According to one estimate, 86,000-100,000 women of reproductive age will be HIV-positive and 230,000 children under 15 years old will have lost their mothers to AIDS by 2005.

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* E/ICEF/1998/2.

** An addendum to the present report containing the final country programme recommendation will be submitted to the Executive Board for approval at its second regular session of 1998.

3. In 1996, Thailand's Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2001) launched the country on a course designed to address the imbalance between economic gains and social progress and to help ensure the rights of excluded and unreached children. However, due to the economic reversal of mid-1997, the country is now faced with the prospect of severe budget constraints and unemployment.

4. Between 1980 and 1994, the percentage of the population living in poverty dropped from 32.6 to 16.3, but income disparity worsened. In the current economic environment, consumer prices have risen sharply, increasing the pressure on disadvantaged groups and putting the survival, protection and development of their children at risk. The problems of youth and geographical disparity in social indicators are linked, and are clustered, for example, in hill tribe and poor urban areas. In addition, youth problems negatively affect the health and development of future generations, as well as the protection and caring capacities of future parents. As the adjustment process continues, it is difficult to predict its further impact on the social sectors and on the sustainability of Thailand's achievements.

## LESSONS LEARNED FROM PAST COOPERATION

5. The 1996 mid-term review recognized Thailand's progress in providing basic services and endorsed a new area-focused programme to build family capabilities and strengthen communities in order to help the disadvantaged make the best use of limited resources. However, it also identified a number of critical challenges, including the need to: focus systems and institutions more on multisectoral collaboration; develop further methods and processes for participatory planning; link local administration with communities; and develop capacities at all levels to plan, execute and monitor activities in support of Thailand's framework for local development planning. Even where laws and the mechanisms to apply them exist, enforcement is weak. At the local level, child and maternal survival issues are largely recognized as common concerns and the community is prepared to participate in addressing such problems, but notwithstanding Thailand's progress in decentralization, the same does not seem to apply to problems of child protection.

6. Recognizing the opportunity provided by the Eighth Development Plan to address some of these issues, United Nations funds and programmes are working with the Government in a "collaborative action plan" in selected subdistricts in four provinces and in one district of Bangkok. This allows UNICEF to draw on the support of the other agencies in dealing with the underlying causes of young child development and youth protection problems in these areas.

7. Some achievements hold lessons for a broader approach. A study, "Moving Child and Family Programmes to Scale in Thailand", identified a convergence of factors which contributed to the success of a pilot programme in early childhood development (ECD). They include: visible, positive effects on children and families; the empowerment of communities and self-help groups around the welfare of the child; the fact that changes were incremental, enhancing rather than duplicating or contradicting the work of government programmes; and the bringing together of a diverse range of government and non-government actors at different levels to share lessons learned and make collaborative decisions. This created a sense of ownership and joint support for scaling up the programme's multisectoral approach. In this process, UNICEF became a key partner in planning and capacity-building and an important catalyst as facilitator, conflict resolver, and forum for open debate. The review, however, also drew attention to the difficulty of expanding the focus from the child to the family

and of moving from pilot phase to national scale, as this entailed a weakening of the integrated mechanism of coordination and a less flexible, more standardized approach to programme implementation. This showed the need for continued attention to putting the child and the family at the centre of local development planning.

## PROPOSED COUNTRY PROGRAMME STRATEGY

8. The Government's Eighth National Development Plan, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the National Plan of Action (NPA) (1992-2001) provide the framework for the next country programme. The new Constitution explicitly prohibits "discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, language and religion" and recognizes the right of nationality by birth for all minorities, hitherto a reservation in Thailand's accession to the Convention. The NPA includes the year 2000 goals, and the Government is committed to their achievement.

9. The objectives of the 1999-2003 country programme are to: (a) support the Government to achieve and sustain the NPA goals through the reduction of disparities among disadvantaged groups; (b) help government and non-government organizations promote awareness of child rights through public education, and strengthen the constituency for children, including through local fund-raising; (c) sharpen the public focus on emerging issues related to children's and women's rights, e.g. child labour, commercial sexual exploitation and HIV/AIDS through policy studies and advocacy; and (d) assist the Government and other partner organizations in the exchange of technical expertise and programme experiences related to child survival, development, protection and participation in the region, particularly in the Mekong subregion.

10. Using the experience gained from the catalytic role of UNICEF and from the balance it achieved in harnessing government and non-government partners in the integrated ECD and other programmes, the major strategy of the country programme will be to enhance family and community capacity for child care and protection. Implemented by the Ministry of Interior at the subdistrict level, the strategy aims to reduce disparities by focusing on marginalized families and youth in unreached and underserved areas. A central feature of local capacity-building will be a participatory planning methodology to help such groups set priorities and solve problems related to access to and use of existing services, or to better draw on community and local administration resources. Such community-based actions will lead to a greater demand for and utilization of basic services and, in turn, help to improve their quality. Targets for reducing disparities in basic services coverage will be set at all levels, with overall achievements monitored by the National Youth Bureau. Documentation of best practices will be used at national policy level to advocate for more comprehensive support systems to extend the application of such participatory approaches, and for policy analysis to address changing socio-economic conditions.

11. Focused on the north, north-east and impoverished urban areas, local-level institutional capacity will also be enhanced to plan, monitor and learn from shared experience, essential processes for improving the responsiveness of basic service institutions. In terms of major links of action, the integrated, community-based nature of the national Family Development Programme will be reinforced through the training and sensitization of newly empowered local authorities, and community school boards will be strengthened. In addition, general improvements in community development processes will be linked with support for marginalized members of that community. As an example, participatory teaching/learning processes needed to address difficult issues in

HIV/AIDS prevention and care provide a model for life skills and values education that need to be shared by the vulnerable and their peers. Principal institutional partners will be the Ministry of Interior, universities, research and development institutes, and the national planning agency. At the local level, networking among government, NGO and community self-help groups will be promoted, while support at the national level will build institutional child protection capacity, including mechanisms to highlight and monitor child rights issues such as school drop-outs, quality of education, sexual exploitation and child labour.

12. The advocacy, communication and social mobilization strategy will combine mass media and other public education approaches to foster changes in attitudes and in the practices of public institutions and the private sector on child rights. Training will focus on building communication capacity among partner organizations to strengthen participatory processes among youth, family and community. To promote more informed choices in areas such as health, child protection and education, social mobilization efforts will provide information through formal and peer group education and build a supportive environment at family, community and service levels. Partners will include the National Youth Bureau, the Ministries of Health, Education and Interior, and academic and research institutions. Support will be sought from various other constituencies, including advertising and public relations firms, the entertainment industry and the mass media.

13. Social policy analysis will be used to improve advocacy and policy development. In view of limited resources, initial studies will aim at increasing knowledge and awareness of protection issues and other emerging concerns, such as the impact of adjustment policies on the most disadvantaged and on the delivery of basic services. With additional funds, studies would be conducted on the underlying and basic causes of protection, survival and development problems. The results would support advocacy for law reform and improvements in the juvenile justice system, youth policies and the ombudsman system, as well as in the employment, insurance and credit environment for victims of HIV/AIDS.

14. Local fund-raising will be linked to tangible programme activities, notably those demonstrating improvement in child protection and development. The dissemination of results to contributors and the broader constituency for children will further strengthen the appeal of local giving.

15. Through links with collaborating universities and documentation of best practices, UNICEF will help to share the Thai experiences in primary health care, early childhood education, sanitation and water supply, nutrition, and child protection with other countries in the region. A programme of site visits and short, professional, on-the-job training opportunities will be developed with universities, government departments and appropriate NGOs.

## ESTIMATED PROGRAMME BUDGET

16. The estimated general resources budget of $3,965,000 for the five-year period 1999-2003 will be allocated by programme on the basis of an ongoing dialogue with the Government. Based on locally raised funds and donor interest, supplementary funding of up to $12,500,000 will be sought for the programme. The current level of economic uncertainty in Thailand will require the programme to be both flexible and responsive to new developments.

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